

Cultural Studies Review
volume 17 number 2 September 2011
<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrl/index>
pp. 11–27
© Nick Mansfield 2011

Teaching Illiteracy

NICK MANSFIELD

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

...all of this was movement in movement.

Jacques Derrida¹

The focus of this article is the issue of cross-cultural teaching, particularly the teaching of Hong Kong students in Sydney. It grows from research I conducted with Elaine Kelly and Elaine Laforzeza with students who were studying cultural studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, who had had at least part of their earlier education in Hong Kong. We also conducted interviews with their cultural studies teachers. One of the issues we were trying to investigate was whether Hong Kong students found the texts teachers chose to illustrate discussions alienating. Would it have been preferable to choose more examples from their own background, from Hong Kong cinema and advertising for example, or was it preferable to use largely Australian or broadly 'Western' examples? Were they in fact studying in a 'Western' context because that's what interested them or what they wanted to know about? The answers here were mixed. Some students thought it would be good to extend the range of textual examples, but most were largely indifferent. Some even seemed

surprised that it was an issue. The question of the national or cultural origin or context of the texts they studied and consumed did not seem an important matter to them, nor did they seem to feel that revealing or historicising this context was especially illuminating, or that the reason they studied particular texts was in some way to gain access to a larger formation that exceeded and generated them, the texts' latent culture, in other words.

Also of interest were the answers of teachers of cultural studies, who said that they encouraged students from all backgrounds to suggest examples that were appropriate for them, that there was no canon of examples, and that cultural studies depended on the integration of issues and ideas from everyday life, something implicitly indefinite and decentred. Furthermore, some argued, it was important not to simplify the concept of students' background and identity: it was a weakness in the classroom if Muslim students, for example, were only encouraged, expected or able to speak when issues arose to do with Islam.

The options for teachers then seemed to be:

- to teach a canon of dubious authority and relevance, that the teacher knows and that is agreed to be appropriate to a certain subject in a certain national-pedagogical context
- to solicit examples from students based on what is identified as their 'backgrounds', but which may not be their primary interest, and which may be unknown to other students, and so not easily discussed
- to ask students to draw on their own backgrounds to provide new and different perspectives on the topics being discussed which are chosen because they supposedly represent what is important in a shared immediate local context, either an Australian one or a global situation as viewed from an Australian point of view
- for academics to set examples from a range of different contexts, in order to acknowledge or even activate cultural difference.

Judgements about these options are made in university classrooms, implicitly and explicitly, every day, not only in cultural studies but in the arts and humanities more generally. I want to begin by outlining the way this issue confronts not just one discipline but all those working in the broad legacy of humanism and its critics.

The first of these options is closest to the traditional model of 'deficit' learning: the teacher knows something; the student does not. The purpose of teaching is to fill the deficit in the student till s/he approaches some level of parity with the teacher. The assumption is that cultures are knowable and known, and that some sense of the deep context that has generated and thus explains them needs to be enlivened in the student, so the texts become transparent and the students get a strong understanding of the mechanics and history that provide specific cultural practices with their meaning, justifying their importance and value as objects of study. Texts thus exemplify culture whose revelation is not only the texts' meaning, but also the thing that itself makes meaning possible. What the student is learning here is what could be called cultural content, the quantifiable expression of human subjects in history. This can be either what is best about them and thus part of a general human quality, or it can simply exemplify what is most essential about a specific group in its specific history.

This pedagogy conforms to a model of a kind of liberal cosmopolitanism, in which awareness of cultural history leads to a sophisticated cultural literacy, even if that knowledge is selective and hierarchised. It at least makes culture appear. It delights in the fact that there are a range of knowledges in the world, which can be mastered by an education that acquaints subjects with a knowable range of cultural contents defined by distance from one another in place or time, out of which either an essential humanity or specific behaviours and representations arise. This cosmopolitanism is humanist in origin and remains the fundamental logic behind teaching in many university and especially high school contexts. In his discussion of what he calls 'the new cosmopolitics', Derrida warns against a 'being at home with oneself' that 'supposes a reception or inclusion of the other which one seeks to appropriate, control and master'.² The alternative to this submission of the other to the self would be to acknowledge culture as a range of non-hierarchised differences that should be allowed to persist. We see traces of this in the other options available to teachers listed above.

The other options have increasingly come to supplant the older humanist model and are thus now historically more important. Here, differences of perspective and textual priority are not only acknowledged but are actually incorporated into the structuring of pedagogy. Indeed, this inclusion is deemed to be

absolutely necessary and ethical, if not indeed the essence of a kind of post-Levinasian ethics itself, not only ethical but ethics *per se*. In the context of large international movements of students, this model of learning extends the Western academy's traditional commitment to types of historicism, both grounded in modern Western philosophical consciousness and exemplified by perceived continuities and consistencies in the formulation of Western knowledges, into a self-critique that remains fixed in Western theory, but aspires to opening it to difference. This difference, however, is more announced than activated, an idea of difference itself now canonical, yet still firmly part of the academy's ever-elaborating self-consciousness. It is not the actual content of cultural differences but the ethos of awareness and openness to cultural difference that is being taught. This style of pedagogy conforms to another logic of cosmopolitanism altogether: one that acknowledges the principle of multiple, or diversifying foundations. Cultures are different from one another, though not quite discrete, but a certain willingness to acknowledge the variety of cultural idioms is possible. It is possible, in other words to have a subject with sympathy for or even oversight of the idea that there are multiple 'cultures,' so that difference becomes not only noticeable, even celebrated, but actually liveable.

In this scenario, a kind of transnational elite forms. It lacks a cultural *lingua franca*, or at least replaces it with a substitute, a reflexive way of acknowledging irreducible human differences. Here, it is sameness that becomes hard to recognise and accept. What is traditionally understood as culture risks becoming indifferent and unimportant, mere evidence for difference. Actual cultural values or priorities become marginal to the difference they exemplify. What in the past has been considered knowledge of another culture gives way to an ever-expanding sense of cultural horizon. Deep immersion in another particular culture to the exclusion of others, for example, starts to seem like a hobby or a fetish or perhaps an admission of invisible family heritage, or perhaps, given the rapidly changing shifts in global economic and political centrality, a personal career risk (who wants to learn Japanese now?).

The critical post-humanism of which cultural studies is a part hopes to use this transcultural situation as the starting point for rigorous critique. However, it finds itself in unchosen yet inevitable collaboration with an international education

marketing industry that has wholly other priorities. International education here functions to create a kind of educated caste. This caste accepts cultural difference by seeing behaviours, practices and artefacts simply as evidence of the inevitable existence of cultural difference. Culture as a framework of established and preferred values is suspended. Thus, in the name of defending cultural difference, the literality of culture as an insistent practice of priority and judgement is abstracted. The emergence into global politics of bold, uncompromising, individual voices articulating strong commitments to certain values seems backward, primitive or even just plain rude. 'Culture' as the source and meaning of human behaviour should keep to itself somehow. Signs of culture should be allowed to be made visible through a carefully calibrated set of protocols and politenesses, but culture itself remains suspended, hypothetical and, in its traditional deep sense, remote. The clear expression of cultural difference is patronised, but to express cultural priority forcefully against other competing positions is seen as somehow immature, unsophisticated, evidence of a non-cosmopolitan narrowness that might be able to wield physical power randomly in fits of populism, but that will remain fundamentally junior to broader cosmopolitan priorities. As many commentators—Slavoj Žižek, for example—have remarked, this creates a global situation in which business, government, NGO or academic leaders in one part of the world have more in common with other leaders elsewhere than they do with members of their own 'national' or 'language' groups. (This seems to be what some of the students we interviewed hope will happen when studying in Australia: they will fit in with a global market dependent on the English language or Western 'culture', which puts them in a desirable 'othered' elite space.) This seems a problematic aim for liberal education, because it is so aggressively and arrogantly utopian. It believes in a not especially happy, yet somehow achieved utopia of a horizon-less world of endlessly open and multiplying diversifications that must be kept at the level of mere representations of human living.

Whatever their differences, each of these scenarios still rests on an understanding of culture as a formation looming behind text, practice and behaviour. Culture is not itself visible but projects itself in and through practice. Like Heideggerean Being, it is the cause and principle of emergence, but does not emerge itself. It can only be known through the things that it manifests, yet we must

acknowledge its existence because it allows us to understand how different practices can be grouped and distinguished and radically historicised in a global context defined politically in terms of national, racial, ethnic and thus broadly cultural differences. Culture, then, functions as a kind of metalanguage into which the subordinate languages of practice can be distributed. Difference is simultaneously acknowledged as a right, a reality and a risk; something that defines a human particularity that needs to be preserved, that, in fact, stands in for all human particularity, constantly seen as under threat. Both the enforcement of cultural priorities and their denial propose risks of violence. The function of education shifts from immersing students in cultures, and helping them to understand the specific ways in which cultures have produced practices, to encouraging an awareness of the principles of cultural difference in general as always latent in human interaction, and thus a constant focus of negotiation and re-negotiation. This negotiation of abstract differences becomes co-extensive with all human relationships that are not strictly speaking intimate.

Critical post-humanism tries to critique and radicalise this negotiation by resisting the liberal platitudes that weaken it in much humanities teaching and neutralise it in general in parliamentary democracies which aim to anaesthetise the public sphere by anaesthetising debate. By consistently revealing how thoroughly inequities, silences and misrepresentations permeate historical determinants, institutional practices and everyday life, cultural studies attempts to restore to analytical consciousness its constitutional commitment to justice.

In sum, though, culture's role in both these cosmopolitanisms that now dominate the humanities seems fundamentally mythical. Source and frame, culture precedes and explains everything. It is to be revealed as a set of knowable investments or as a virtual field that renominates and instantiates what difference fundamentally is. It is to be either deeply if only partially known, on the one hand, or acknowledged without being approached, on the other. In both scenarios, then, culture is a remystification presented as a demystification. The second cosmopolitanism identified above at least acknowledges that there is a certain cultural illiteracy necessary to the educational process, and not merely as a starting-point to be corrected, but as a permanent and enduring accompaniment of all cultural exchange. It identifies *not* understanding culture as fundamental to

cosmopolitanism. Indeed, understanding the specific dynamics of specific cultures is as good as irrelevant to this view, perhaps even a category error. What it does not question is the amorphous parental spectre of culture itself, looming behind practice as its meaning. It does not entertain the idea of cultural engagement separate from culture. The groundlessness of our students' experience of culture normally seems a deficit to humanities teachers, even in our post-humanist pedagogy. It is something teachers need to fill out, to render self-conscious, in short, to educate. Yet, perhaps what the students we interviewed were showing was more the nature of contemporary textual and cultural experience, where the experience of culture is not one in which individual subjects appreciate a range of texts from a variety of cultural backgrounds because they understand or are gaining access to those cultural backgrounds, or merely acknowledging that different cultural backgrounds exist. They love texts without understanding or even caring about their backgrounds, or survive in a cultural milieu that is their own but that they are unable to understand perhaps because they cannot speak all of its languages. They live in a world where not speaking the languages of your context, indeed all of your own languages, is the norm.

For example, in our study an opposition developed pretty much as shorthand between Hong Kong and Australian/Western culture. Yet, Hong Kong cinema is much more part of Sydney culture than French, German or UK cinema, and perhaps much more than much Hollywood cinema. There has been a large Cantonese speaking population in Sydney for more than one hundred and fifty years, and there are hundreds of shops in which Hong Kong cinema is easily available. Just because I don't speak Cantonese doesn't mean that Hong Kong cinema is not part of my culture or cultural milieu. I would certainly think for my 16-year-old son, Hong Kong cinema would be much more recognisable than the films of Gerard Depardieu, or Ken Loach. His favourite texts are *The Odyssey*, John Marsden's *Tomorrow* books and the Manga series *Death Note*. His best friend dresses in Japanese schoolgirl clothes she buys over the internet, and does her hair and makeup to look like a Manga character. They do not know or understand the cultural background out of which these texts arise, and increasingly out of which their own behaviour arises. They are not part of a cosmopolitan elite moving seamlessly between whole cultures. They are immersed in cultural practices whose origin and meaning they cannot and

largely do not seek to understand. They are illiterate in the cultures that they make and remake. The dislocation in these textual experiences is irreducible. I don't know what Oskar's love of *Death Note* means, but it certainly means something different from what it would mean to a 16-year-old Japanese kid. I don't know what it means that his friend Jade thinks she dresses like she's just got off the train at Harajuko station, but I do know she will never be 'Japanese', and she would never for a moment think she is.

Our own 'culture', then, arises in languages we do not understand. Cantonese language cinema is part of my culture, even though I will never speak Cantonese, and will never 'understand' those texts. We are speaking and hearing languages we do not understand. This both strengthens and weakens us at the same time. As teachers, we are teaching textual examples we do not and cannot 'know', in the traditional maieutic sense of that term. Above all, students are writing essays in languages they cannot master. For some, this language is English; for most it is academic discourse. The solution to this problem has traditionally been more training, deeper immersion in or experience of academic English, especially for international students. If only they spoke the language better, then they would behave in class as all students are supposed to. I'm not opposed to giving international students greater confidence with the languages in which we expect them to speak and write. What I am opposed to is using this as the model of their situation in general, or to think that dislocations—or what I'd prefer to call our multiple illiteracies—are reducible or that it is desirable to reduce them. But if we cannot understand such illiteracy as a deficit in knowledge, or demonstration of mastery of the logic of cultural difference, how are we to understand it?

—

I want to connect this argument with Jacques Derrida's discussion of his own education, colonialism and what he calls the 'inalienable alienation' of language.³ In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida thinks through his own relationship with the French language. 'I only have one language,' he writes, yet that language 'is not mine'.⁴ Derrida's first language is French. He describes himself as monolingual. Yet, because of his background, he cannot simply see himself or be seen as another French subject. Nor, however, is his relationship to the French language a

straightforward exclusion, in which a resolute belonging is imagined as the experience of other more simply French people. Derrida is not simply a French-speaking outsider. He writes: 'When I said that the only language I speak is *not mine*, I did not say it is foreign to me.'⁵ He is neither at one with this language nor simply excluded from it. Normally it would be seen to be the means by which his subjectivity arises, and to which it is ever returning as the formative horizon of identification, yet it is not his, in the literal sense of that idiom. 'But who exactly possesses it?' he writes. 'And whom does it possess? Is language in possession, ever a possessing or possessed possession? Possessed or possessing in exclusive possession, like a piece of personal property? What of this being-at-home ... in language toward which we never cease returning?'⁶ This relationship with language is particular, grounded in Derrida's own experience. Yet it is also general. 'This inalienable alienation ... structures the peculiarity ... and property of language. It institutes the *phenomenon* of hearing-oneself-speak in order to mean-to-say.'⁷ Mastery or ownership of language is illusory, a phantasm introduced into representations of cultural identity to create a purely imaginary centre of gravity around which violent discriminations can be deployed:

For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and *naturally*, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as 'his own'.⁸

The use of the term 'master' is self-conscious, and absolutely crucial for our purposes. Derrida's passion here is grounded in his own experience of education. This alienation from his own only language is not only a theoretical issue. It is the persistence of his experience as an Algerian Jew under Vichy, when his citizenship was taken away from him and he was excluded from school, or, when in school

again, he experienced the way in which different languages were distributed in a hierarchy that reflected colonial priorities and prejudices. The issues are fundamentally to do with the colonialising and racialising function of education. The master is a schoolmaster: 'this experience is still and especially lived through the school', he writes.⁹ 'The master took the form, primarily and particularly, of the schoolteacher.'¹⁰

What Derrida is drawing attention to then is the historical violence that structures and warps the experience of language. The violence of language is in fact the most fundamental thing about it: 'inside languages, there is a terror, soft, discrete, or glaring; that is our subject'.¹¹ He goes on: 'All culture is originally colonial.'¹² Derrida's exclusion from mastery of the French language positions him as a de-privilegible subject excisable from the imagined community of legitimate and authoritative Frenchness. The centre of this Frenchness is not inhabited by the most authentically French subjects. It is vacant, but as a phantasm, it does allow subjects to be distributed differentially in relation to an illusion of attainable liveable self-identity.

The question proposed by the study we undertook with Hong Kong students might show, however, that these insights need to be extended further. Are we now seeing a transition to a global cultural context in which even this phantasm of cultural identity has been superseded, by a no-less political but somehow less explicitly colonial distribution of cultural identifications, one in which, indeed, even the trope of identification or subjectification has been superseded? Derrida's account is important because it provides a way of describing this transition and because it refuses to culture any sense of ground or enduring determining self-identity. It does this by replacing the concept of metalanguage which still survives in our pedagogy of culture, even when we refuse it, with another way of thinking language altogether, in terms of what Derrida calls '*langues d'arrivée*'.¹³ It is this concept that I now want to investigate further.

Derrida identifies three ways in which the subject might contrive to ground itself in a monolingualism whose certainty as the embodiment of a single historical and cultural trajectory is illusory. The subject can enter 'an amnesia without recourse', a 'madness' in which the lack of self-certainty is experienced as absolute, where groundlessness is taken as an irremediable destining towards personal

nothingness.¹⁴ An education in which difference is fetishised at the expense of the specificity and reality of cultural values themselves—in which value is placed above values, ethics above positionality—would seem to be destined towards this evacuation of the self, even though it might be disguised by material dominance. Or secondly, an ‘average’ or ‘dominant’ national type could be invented, in what Derrida calls ‘the integrative guise’ which is, in its fantasy of an exclusive self-identity, itself simply ‘another type of madness’.¹⁵ Both are types of amnesia, a forgetting of, on the one hand, that subjectivity even in its postmodern sense must emerge in and as something, in differences, not just difference *per se*, and, on the other hand, that the too rigid formulation of what those differences are results in a deadening homogenisation, a fantasy ground which leads inevitably to a politics of exclusion. The alternative to these two amnesias is what Derrida calls ‘hypermnnesia ... a surfeit, or even excrescence of memory, to commit oneself, at the limit of the two other possibilities, to traces—traces of writing, language, experience—which carry anamnesis beyond the mere reconstruction of a given heritage, beyond an available past’.¹⁶ In this option, the subject is neither abandonment nor fakery. In fact, it never becomes even a contrived singularity or totality at all, either as empty or full. Instead, it emerges as what Derrida has called in another context a ‘set’ of stagings of the fragments and impulses that endure in our languages, a lived remembering of the misidentifications, ambiguities and possibilities that inhere in language as it is used.¹⁷ Here, politics does not emerge because the language is the result and expression of a structured political situation, which determines it and which it reflects. The politics arises in the staging, not in the inheritance. This is what lies behind Derrida’s distinction between ‘source languages’, which maintain the illusion of originary determination and *langues d’arrivée*, or ‘target languages’, as this phrase has been translated.¹⁸ The ‘monolingual’ who ‘speaks a language of which he is *deprived*’ has only target languages, ‘the remarkable experience being ... that these languages cannot manage to reach themselves because they no longer know where they are coming from, what they are speaking *from* and what the sense of their journey is’.¹⁹

Target languages are languages in which subjectivation emerges as a provisional set of impulses and investments marked by a past recoverable only as the animated traces the languages themselves resuggest. Yet, they do not structure

subjectivity so much as subjectivity is directed towards them. The past they present is one towards which we are heading. They are not then the legacy or remnant of a stable, determined past, of a nurturing matrix, culture, out of which meaning is generated and that is itself the ultimate repository or revelation of (political, social, historical, human, whatever) meaning. Like everything of the past that can still affect us, they emerge as our future. We are heading towards them. How can it be otherwise? It is the futurity of these languages that counts then, not their complex bearing of a past behind us, on which we must consider ourselves grounded and against which we must be read, or to which we should attend, either as the bearer of cultural content or unspecified difference. They are then a memory larger than subjectivity, beyond simple or even total recall, the always excessive patterning of a past coming towards us in its irreducibly unknown form.

The past of the languages we are heading towards then does not necessarily arrogate certain memories or feelings to certain people. As we have seen, the idea that individuals have privileged access to elements of a language-culture is, according to Derrida, a chimera introduced into languages as either the persistence of a kind of national chauvinism whose fundamental aim is to exclude the junior, the immigrant, the exile, or the seeker after refuge, or it is the diagnosis of the other's permanent inadequacy, their disposition to crime, to family dysfunction, or to incompetences of one kind or another. Privileged modes of subjectivity flourish in target languages, and we chose sometimes to occupy them, sometimes to respect them as models of authority of one kind or another, but they are not essential or enduring. The past these languages bear is loaded and political, yes, but not finished or closed. There is not equal access to them, as if they are an open ground or level playing field. Every possible subjectivity approaches them differentially from a different place at a different entry point, arriving at a different point with its own advantages over others, and its own disadvantages. The languages themselves are not neatly discrete, or even in a way what we might understand as self-identical languages at all, in the conventional sense, with their own exclusive esoteric grammars and neatly circumscribed borders. They overlap and blur, interpenetrate and confuse, weaken and strengthen one another, sometimes operating as fertile grounds of invention, at other times, as rigid institutions of exclusion. Yet, all they have is the future.

This irrepressible futurity is captured in Derrida's very term: *langues d'arrivée* are not only target languages, but also languages of the event. They are the place where things happen. In late Derrida, the possibility of the event always involves the necessary openness to historical, political and subjective otherness. Anything might arrive and we must be prepared for it. These languages are languages of the other, whether this other is promise of community or the threat of violence, or perhaps even both at the same time; the violence of community or even of justice, the threat of the new, the danger the excessive other might always bring. *Arriver* betokens that to which you might be heading, but also that which might happen to you, even success, in all its danger.

Normally, Derrida's account would be taken as a subversive complaint against the repressive homogenisations of presence, essentialism and national, ethnic or political unity. And it is all that but, at the same time, the evocation of a futurity of languages to which we are heading rather than from which we are coming, and in which otherness is threaded, is not the promise of a greater freedom from coloniality. The colonial past remains traced in these languages and in the politics that gives rise to them, but *langues d'arrivée* are larger, open to other politics altogether, politics that compromise us but that also offer the possibility of invention. Indeed, it is inventions of one kind or another that *langues d'arrivée* propose. They are repoliticising, not through origin but through the various situations they contrive and people.²⁰ These languages offer the play between invention and reappropriation. 'Reappropriation always takes place,' Derrida writes, it is 'inevitable', yet at the same time, *langues d'arrivée* offer the chance of things happening: 'this new idiom *makes things happen* ... this signature brought forth ... produces events in the given language, the given language to which things might still be given, sometimes *unverifiable* events: illegible events'.²¹ Such events are unverifiable because they are not explained or accommodated by inherited systems of identification and thus validation. They are beyond the reductive paradigms of cultural determinisms. They cannot be folded back into the past out of which they are seen to come, but instead they rework the past towards which we are directed, by proposing what can be made through and beyond it.

This political invention is less accident than opportunity, the possibility of making politics beyond the limiting determinisms of simple cultural histories and

relativities. Politics is not simply something to be educated by an awareness of a plurality of pasts enacting themselves in texts and practices. Novel, site, graffiti or tattoo mark do not recall or reflect the cultural situations that produced them. They are 'inventions of the other', to use a Derridean phrase, in which cultural histories and futures are met simultaneously. Their situation as Australian, postcolonial, feminist, subversive, queer or anything is not the secret they bear with them, but the danger they make. It is, I believe, the way our students currently experience them, not as a culture, yours or mine, theirs or ours, which they seek to know, or feel they need to be educated in, but as sites of making. When the Hong Kong students we interviewed seemed indifferent to the identifiable locality of the culture they were encountering in their cultural studies, it was not that they were simply ignorant of the deep background of the texts we offered, or passive in the face of their education or renegades from their own past. Instead, they reflect a new cosmopolitanism whose politics will be a series of complex situational improvisations rather than inherited meanings and the deconstruction of those meanings.

—

We started by outlining two types of cosmopolitanism that have had a defining influence on modern and postmodern humanities pedagogy. Under the first, culture is an expression of what is best about the human or most typical of a human group, and the role of pedagogy is to induct individual students into a *lingua franca* made up of what are identified as the best practices of subjectivity, its even-tempered sensibility, its hunger for ascendancy, its aspiration to feel and be better. This education is about the recognition and transmission of cultural content as part of the enrichment of a subjectivity that is simultaneously revealed and developed. The second cosmopolitanism holds cultural content in suspension as implicitly esoteric, the instantiation of a difference that cannot and should not be overcome. It is awareness of the fact of this difference itself that is crucial. Difference also manifests itself at the level of subjectivity: different cultural languages are the locus of the incubation of subjectivities that are themselves cultural artefacts.

For both of these cosmopolitanisms, culture is the larger frame of meaning-making either produced by or producing whatever can be continuous and recognisable about subjectivity. *Langues d'arrivée*, on the other hand, are the site

neither of subjectivity as essence nor as construct. Subjectification in *langues d'arrivée* is an event, in which improvisation takes place at the intersection point of trace and otherness, of what remains marked, and what is yet-to-come. Yet, here, subjectivity is not necessary. Living *langues d'arrivée* involves projections into a field of multiple and rapidly generated languages of behaviour, taste, judgement and performance, yet it does not require the stabilisation of subjectivity at all, even as fiction. The contemporary experience of meaning-making systems is not of the assignment of idioms and motifs to historically stable configurations. Nor does it even reveal local or national origins, except as the production of a further set of traces and marks. Multiple languages of meaning and practice propose themselves to us, and we enter into them. They are not simply the products of a long history. This does not mean that they are unmarked by politics, but this politics is not an inheritance (in which stable quantities of collective intention and valuation determine ongoing practices that they effectively own and subtend) so much as it is a trace, in which fractions of political struggles continue to exert stress on significant pressure-points which we are not always ready to recognise or deal with, but with which we must and do deal. This politics then emerges not as the endurance of identities but as the microcataclysms experienced differentially at different moments by what never quite become subjects.

Cultural studies has been historically so important because among academic disciplines it provides the most rigorous critique of academic assumptions about culture, history and identity. Cultural studies has done more than any other discipline to meet the challenge proposed by *langues d'arrivée*, in its embrace of theoretical models as diverse as the Baudrillardian simulacrum (which recognised the deracination of cultural forms, while remaining mesmerised by it at the expense of any sense of their enduring realisation of political violences) and Butlerian performativity (which articulated by way of the trope of the 'failure to repeat' how otherness is only ever invented as a contestation of recurring political identities). The deconstruction of representation and identity, however, always cedes anteriority to representation and identity themselves, thus trapping critique in the penumbra of the very logics they have recognised as problematic.

Yet, so much cultural studies teaching remains locked—often unquestioningly because of the way in which individual courses and teaching units have to be

defined in undergraduate handbooks, and how they have to distinguish themselves from one another—in a traditional logic of situatedness, defined by canonical markers of national, regional, gender or other types of identity; in short, by the two cosmopolitanisms that define humanities pedagogy more generally.

How do we teach in a context where these markers are increasingly contrived in the terms Derrida outlines above, as modes of at least potential chauvinism imposed on cultural experience to enforce government, institutional, industrial or radical agendas? By embracing cultural politics as trace rather than inheritance, we invent new types of situatedness, ones in which older models of cultural literacy no longer offer much. If traditionally the model of pedagogy is one of instilling literacy of one kind or another (in national identity or critical consciousness), we are now in the position of teaching illiteracy. This takes a variety of forms, starting with the impossibility of teachers—or anyone in fact—being deeply immersed in any privileged set of cultural languages identified as prioritised for education in or even awareness of what is being generated rapidly as meaning production. We do not and cannot know the languages each of us speaks. But it goes further than that. We are in fact speaking languages we do not speak, and it is in this ever-renewing, ever-fading, ever-resituating situation that our politics is constantly, inevitably, menacingly being reinvented.

The old cosmopolitanisms represent two types of politics, neither chimerical nor negligible: one, in which politics was an expression or enactment of the will of humanity in general or specific human groups; the other in which the goal was the recognition of facilitation of human differences. By way of an emphasis on futurity and the event, *langues d'arrivée* restore the possibility of invention to politics, a politics of necessary confrontations, struggles and negotiations, remaking the past that comes towards us, without remaining in thrall to it.

—

Nick Mansfield is Professor of Critical and Cultural Studies and Dean, Higher Degree Research, at Macquarie University. He has recently published *Theorizing War: From Hobbes to Badiou* (2008) and *The God Who Deconstructs Himself: Subjectivity and*

Sovereignty Between Freud, Bataille and Derrida (2010). He is one of the founding general editors of *Derrida Today*.

Thanks to Elaine Kelly and Elaine Laforteza for all their help with this project, for their research work, interviewing skills and sound editorial advice.

—NOTES

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998, p. 50.

² Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 5, 17.

³ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 25.

⁴ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 1.

⁵ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 5.

⁶ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 17.

⁷ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 25.

⁸ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 23.

⁹ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 42.

¹¹ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 23.

¹² Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 39.

¹³ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 61.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 60.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 60.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 401.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 61.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, pp. 60, 61.

²⁰ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 63.

²¹ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, p. 66.